

U.S. WITHDRAWAL WORRIES ITS ALLIES AND COMMON AFGHAN

“If you don't know where you are going, you might wind up someplace else” this saying encapsulates nearly two decades of U.S. war in Afghanistan as U.S. President Joe Biden abandoned the country labeling it as an “unwinnable war”

A war ensued weeks after the 9/11 attacks in the United States, President George W. Bush authorized the attacks against Al-Qaeda hideouts and Taliban targets in land-locked Afghanistan.

The U.S. administration put forth the goal to disrupt terrorist sanctuaries and to weaken the military capability of the Taliban as it never differentiated between the two. The harsh response was an outcome of Taliban rejection of U.S. demand to hand over Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

The American troops with their military might toppled the Taliban government and crushed its fighting capabilities. In 2003, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld announced an end to major combat operations in the country. The United States and its NATO partners pivoted to rebuild the Afghan state and established a western-style democracy with Hamid Karzai at the helm of power and later on, replaced with Ashraf Ghani. It spent about \$144bn on the reconstruction of a poor, war-ravaged country and invested approximately \$88.32bn on Afghan security forces to stand against the Taliban. The government was dependent on foreign aids to provide basic facilities. The corruption was rampant, the military was weak against the adversary, and the Taliban controlled majority of the country.

The U.S. presence in Afghanistan created a contradictory polity, divided among insurgents who tried to end the occupation and collaborators who helped the U.S. to prevent the fall of their Kabul government. Although, the U.S. failed to prevent the fall of the government and its forces withdrew from Afghanistan under the Doha agreement 2020 with the Taliban. The country came under Taliban control while the U.S abandoned the Afghan people.

The hasty withdrawal of foreign troops without settling the stable peace process sent tremors amongst Afghan people and throughout the region. What happens in Afghanistan is bound to affect the region as well international system. Meanwhile, the situation in Afghanistan is increasingly dire. Many international humanitarian organizations fear that the worst humanitarian crisis is brewing in Afghanistan.

HARDSHIPS FACED BY AFGHAN PEOPLE

Twenty years later, the United States and its coalition of 40 or so partners have closed their bases and removed their soldiers from Afghanistan. The Taliban have gained control of the country and looking for international recognition. In all this, common Afghans have been on the verge of collapse. Earlier during the 20 years long war, at least 100,000 Afghan civilians have been killed or injured.

Poverty

Afghanistan is one of the world's poorest countries, with 6 out of 10 Afghans living in poverty and a GDP per capita of less than 1% of that of the United States. Many homes and necessary infrastructure have been damaged, and the war economy has pushed many Afghans further into poverty. The only benefit this decades-long war has for drug lords and warlords tied to the state. Over the course of the 20-year occupation, opium and heroin consumption soared in Afghanistan, with millions of Afghans turning to narcotics to escape their terrible life. Meanwhile, under the Taliban government, the Afghan people have been looking for ways to live for one day more. The U.S has frozen the foreign assets of the country while foreign aid has been funneled into the country but the situation is increasingly dire.

Refugee Status

There are more than 2.5 million Afghan refugees registered in Pakistan, Iran, and other countries. Internal displacement has increased by three million Afghans. Following the spectacular Taliban win in mid-August 2021, these figures have climbed.

Meanwhile, many displaced Afghans, whether inside or outside Afghanistan's borders, lack the basic necessities of life and are exposed to disease and abuse. At the same time, tens of thousands of Afghans who served for the US military are asking Washington to enable them to bring their families to the US. Some have been allowed by the Biden administration, but many more are still waiting to be moved to the United States and allied countries.

Afghan women and Children

In Afghanistan, the position of women and children has not improved significantly. Since the Taliban took power in the late 1990s, the maternal death rate has not changed, with 1.6 women dying for every 100 deliveries. In the last 20 years, however, more women have entered the workforce, and more children, particularly girls, have had access to elementary education.

Women and girls' situations have become worse since the 2021 Taliban takeover in many rural areas: not only did they not receive adequate help or education, but they also had to deal with acute poverty, threats of violence.

Worried US Allies

The manner of the US withdrawal redefined regional stakes. The fear of worsening political and security situation and spread of instability across the region is a matter of great concern for the regional countries. The internal power struggle, divided Afghan leadership, hasty foreign troops withdrawal, and Taliban-controlled Afghanistan has the potential to disturb the already aggravated power equation in Afghanistan. In all this chaos, US allies are worried about the worst spillover. Also, the power vacuum created by U.S. withdrawal has certainly created new forces, prompting involvement from regional countries to protect their interests. The neighboring states are worried about a new ISIS threat emerging from Afghanistan which will definitely harm their interests. Meanwhile, the countries like India which helped the US in Afghanistan feel a sense of shame and abandonment by the US. Over the past two decades, India has invested about \$3 billion in Afghanistan in an attempt to establish a strong relationship with Kabul. India's presence in Afghanistan enabled it to strategically encircle and frustrate Pakistanis. In the current circumstances, India's foothold in Afghanistan has been weakened as the Taliban control the whole country.

European allies have also been side-lined while defining the parameter of US withdrawal. The lack of coordination and hasty actions by the US also harmed the European interests in Afghanistan. During the withdrawal, many European citizens were left on their own because of such negligent actions. This not only created a trust gap but also put allies in an awkward situation.

Although, the US has tried to minimize the damage, however, the environment in which all these actions took place made the overall situation worst and damaging. The US has to establish a mechanism to study the decade-long conflict so that it avoids repeating the same mistake.